**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Toni Norton-Stanley**

Interview Conducted by

Juliana Nykolaiszyn

August 5, 2016

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Toni Norton-Stanley is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on August 5, 2016.

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**About Toni Norton-Stanley…**

Toni Norton-Stanley was born in 1949 in Vinita, Oklahoma, to Rex “Pete” and Wanda Norton. Her grandparents, and later her parents, owned and operated the Randall-Norton Tire Company in Vinita. Toni attended Hall-Halsell Elementary the first grade through the fourth, Ironside School the fifth and sixth grades, and then junior high and high school back in Vinita. She participated in activities such as being a twirler in the band and being a candy striper. She graduated from high school in 1967 and the summers following her sophomore, junior, and senior years Toni worked at the Glass House Restaurant. While she did various tasks there, Toni was primarily a waitress.

Toni attended Oklahoma State University the fall semester of 1967 and then transferred to Northeast Oklahoma A&M to finish her freshman year. At that point Toni married and began a family. In the mid-1970s she completed a cosmetology program and owned a beauty shop for a few years before deciding to return to college to pursue a teaching degree. Toni graduated from the University of Tulsa with a degree in music education. She became a band director and then moved from teaching music to teaching marketing and business. She retired from Vinita Public Schools in 2004 but did not retire from the workforce. Toni bought a travel agency and she continues to be a travel agent. In addition to work, Toni and her husband are enjoying their children and grandchildren.

**About the Glass House…**

At the half-way point on the Will Rogers Turnpike near Vinita, Oklahoma, stands an iconic landmark. The arched building opened in 1957 and was the first restaurant built over a U.S. public highway. Conoco (Continental Oil Company) commissioned the building with an aim to serve the needs of motorists passing in both directions. The building housed the Glass House Restaurant, dedicated in 1958, and included a cafeteria, snack bar, and sit-down restaurant. On each side of the building, motorists enjoyed full-service gas stations, operated by Conoco initially. Over the years other restaurants and fuel facilities have operated at the service plaza. Host International, Interstate Hosts and Howard Johnson’s have operated the plaza at different times. The Glass House and the Conoco stations employed many of the area’s youth through the years and served many, many travelers. Renovation began on the service plaza in 2012 and in 2014 it re-opened with a new name, the Will Rogers Archway.

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| **Toni Norton Stanley**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn  August 5, 2016  Vinita, Oklahoma |  |

**Nykolaiszyn** *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn with the Oklahoma State University Library. Today is Friday, August 5, 2016. I’m in Vinita, Oklahoma, interviewing Toni Norton Stanley as part of our Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project with the focus on the Glass House Restaurant. Toni, thank you for joining us today.*

**Stanley** Thank you for asking.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, let’s learn a little bit more about you. Can you tell me the year you were born and where you were born?*

**Stanley** I was born in Vinita, Oklahoma, at the Vinita Hospital on July 26, 1949.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and tell me a little bit about your parents.*

**Stanley** My parents were both from Vinita. My mother, Wanda Randall Norton, and my dad Pete Norton, whose name was really Rex Eugene but he went by Pete growing up, they both went to school in Vinita. Mother went to Vinita High—well actually she went a little bit to Sacred Heart also, but she mainly went to Vinita Public Schools. Daddy went to Sacred Heart Academy but they were both, you know, from Vinita. Mother was the daughter of business people here in Vinita. Jesse and Ellen Randall, my grandparents, had a tire shop and so she grew up in the business world. My dad was a jockey, to begin with, when he was a young man. He lived with his aunt and uncle—grew up there. Then he went on to OSU, which was Oklahoma A&M, but he only went to school there for, I think, one year and then came back and he went into business with my grandparents.

They had the Randall-Norton Tire Company, and then my grandparents retired and Mother and Daddy kept the business and stayed there until they sold it in, I’m going to say in the early’80s, I think, sometime. I grew up in the business also, working with them and my mother’s best friend was Annabell Southern. So I knew a lot about the Glass House and as a child I always wanted to work there. I thought that was fantastic. We didn’t have any escalators in Vinita and you could go up the escalators to go to (laughs) the Glass House. My mother and Annabell were in a sorority together, Epsilon Sigma Alpha Sorority, and they would have a lot of meetings at the Glass House. As an only child on a Sunday afternoon when they’d have a meeting, sometimes Mother would ask me to come with her you know, to just get out of the house. So I would go up and down the escalator and roam the halls of the Glass House and do that sort of thing. I was always active in a lot of different activities in Vinita, as were my parents. So we’re Vinitans.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So tell me about the schools you attended growing up.*

**Stanley** Hall-Halsell Elementary which is on the north side of Vinita. I went there from my first grade to fourth grade and then we moved to the country whenever I was actually in the second grade. But my grandparents became my legal guardians so I could stay in school in town. Then my fifth and sixth grade year, Mother decided that it was okay if I went out to Ironside School. So I went out there my fifth and sixth grade. While it was a really good experience, it didn’t really prepare me much for the upper grades in junior high and high school. So when I came back to school in the seventh grade at the Vinita Junior High, I was little bit behind but I caught up and it was okay. And then I went to high school in Vinita and graduated in the Class of 1967.We’ll celebrate our 50th anniversary next year. I was a twirler in the band, did a lot of activities. I was a candy striper, I was in Rainbows, did a lot of things like that.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And after high school, what happened? What did you do?*

**Stanley** Okay, after high school I went to college. I went to OSU. I only went there for one semester. Then I came back to Vinita and went to Northeast Oklahoma A&M in Miami [Oklahoma]. Finished my freshman year there, got married, had children, went to cosmetology school in, I’m going to say ’73 or ’74, somewhere along in there. Had my own beauty shop then for a couple or three years. Then I decided that wasn’t for me and I wanted to go back to school. Thought I wanted to be a teacher, a music teacher. So I went back to college and finished at NEO [Northeast Oklahoma A&M] and then I went to the University of Tulsa. Graduated, got my degree in music education, became a high school band director, and taught school in Ketchum and ultimately in Vinita and did most of my teaching there. Went from teaching music to teaching marketing, business education, and retired from Vinita schools about twelve years ago I guess. And then bought a travel agency and since then I have been a travel agent, so…

**Nykolaiszyn** *A little bit of everything.*

**Stanley** …right.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay. What year did you graduate from TU [University of Tulsa]?*

**Stanley** Oh geez…1978 I want to say.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay and what year did you retire from teaching?*

**Stanley** (Laughs) Twenty…how old am I? Sixty-seven. Would have been ten years ago. This is 2016. Would have been ’05.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay. Well let’s get back to the Glass House.*

**Stanley** Sure.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And so you know you would have been a little girl, but do you recall them putting in the turnpike?*

**Stanley** Oh yes. I remember it very well. We lived not too far from where the turnpike went by Vinita from, you know, northeast to southwest and so I remember we used to drive the turnpike before it was open. That was a common thing for people to do because…I don’t why. I was a kid so I don’t remember why, but I just remember that we would get on the turnpike and drive to Tulsa. Now we didn’t do much going to Joplin. We’d go to Joplin, I went to Joplin a lot. My great-grandmother lived up there, but I don’t remember driving the turnpike so much, but we did drive the turnpike a lot going to Tulsa and back and forth. I remember them building the turnpike, yes, very much. That was a big, big deal in Vinita back in those days. And lots of people worked on the turnpike because, you know, it was such a huge undertaking. We had a lot of people who worked there when they were building it.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And so when you saw this arched structure going up, you know, what are some of your early memories?*

**Stanley** How in the world is this thing going to stand up, you know? Because it’s crossing a highway, a four lane highway. How’s it going to… how’s it going to stay up there without falling down in the middle? Of course I was a kid then so I didn’t really understand things like that, but it was fascinating as a child. It was a very fascinating structure and the thought that it was going to be over the highway and it was going to have several restaurants, and a gift shop and all kinds of things, we were all just in awe, as kids especially. I can remember when we were a little older…twelve or fourteen I guess, maybe. Twelve years old when it… ten, something like that, when it opened. I don’t remember the year it opened, but I do remember going there and thinking it was the most fantastic place I had ever seen. And I had been a lot of places and traveled. My parents were quite the travelers and I traveled a lot when I was a kid. But to live in a place that would have something like that, it was just fantastic.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So, what I want you kind of to do for me is describe the old building back in the day. So when I walk in, what do I see?*

**Stanley** Well when you walked in—well first we always parked outside because we, you know, didn’t get on the turnpike to drive to the Glass House. We would pull up from over the bridge or over the viaduct, over the top of the turnpike from the north going south and then turn in there. Turn back west and park outside and then we would walk across the driveway. Which was where the Phillips…I’m sorry, Conoco stations were, whichever direction you were going east, you know, or north or south…east or west I mean. Most of the time we would park over on the south side and come in from that direction. When you walked in the door, there was a big, big rock wall and you would see… there were always like plants and tall things like maybe banana trees or something like that in the little garden area. It wasn’t a garden area. I guess it was an atrium. They were always right there when you walked in the door and then there was the elevator if you needed to take the elevator to go up. Also, there was that escalator that everybody wanted to ride up and down the escalator. So you had that option too.

Well actually when you walked in the door the elevator was off to your right, and straight ahead was the employee entrance, and if you were a worker, you’d just go right on through that direction. That’s where all the stuff took place. Go up the escalator, and when you would top the escalator on the right there were restrooms down there and also the snack bar was on that side. Which, you know, as a teenager working there and as a younger kid I never really did know much about what went on at the snack bar, because it was open only at night after everything else was closed. That was where like the truckers came in and they wanted coffee, a sandwich or something, they’d go up there. Then if you went to your left, right as you turned left was the cafeteria line and then across the hall was the door to go into the kitchen. Down the hall was the Broiler Room, which was the big restaurant, and then beyond that were two banquet rooms, just beyond the Broiler Room and then some more bathrooms down that left side.

At the end of the hallway was the gift shop and that’s where as a kid, I always wanted that giant lollipop that was about this big around, you know. It was huge and it sat right in the middle of all the lollipops…different size lollipops, you know. I always thought, “Oh, wow! Man, wouldn’t that be fun to eat that lollipop?” It’d take you two years, but everybody thought that lollipop was something because it was right there. They had all kinds of things that were Oklahoma. Lots of Indian things, Native American. We are Cherokee here in this part of the country. This is our nation and my family’s Cherokee and so we would see lots of things. They’d have dolls, they’d have moccasins, they had little… oh dress up outfits and things like that were Native American and then of course like I said, everything Oklahoma. So you could get almost anything you wanted, especially if it was some kind of souvenir or whatever from Oklahoma, in the gift shop. Then of course like I said, you’d have those lollipops (laughs) and all the candies and things like that that kids always want. Then there was another set of escalators and an elevator (that would be the north end, far end) where the gift shop was too. If you were going westbound you would park there and then come up those stairs, those escalators or elevator.

Yeah, it was a fantastic place and you know, the ceiling was very high and the rounded, you know, the archway was…I don’t remember what kind of ceiling it was, it was probably…I don’t know maybe it was a blown concrete or something. The walls were rock and they were beautiful rock walls. I loved those walls and always thought that they were so pretty. The floors were tile and probably the most fantastic thing about the whole place was the fact that you could watch the traffic from either side. If you were in the Broiler Room, you could see the traffic…well you could see the east side. Then on the west side, there were louvers that were, I’m assuming, probably on a timer, I don’t really know. But they would turn with the sun so it wouldn’t get so terribly hot in there. It would get hot, believe me, on that side. But it would block some of the sun so you didn’t get quite as hot. The louvers, I’m sure they were on some sort of a timer.

Then there were gas stations below on both sides depending on, you know, which direction you were going. Then underneath, downstairs, on both sides were the workings, you know, within the…The mechanical stuff in the kitchen and storage and the bakery and all kinds of things like that. It was a pretty fantastic place. I mean I think for its time it was quite an engineering feat. I think it was but of course I don’t know.

**Nykolaiszyn** *How were the bathrooms?*

**Stanley** Bathrooms were just standard bathrooms. They were several stalls you know, and then you know, they had a couple of sinks and mirror and of course your little sanitary things that you…you know little machines. They were pretty clean most of the time. Annabell made sure. She was pretty good about running a tight ship. She kept things going. You had bathrooms upstairs on both sides, and I think there were bathrooms in the gas stations on both sides downstairs too. Of course the employees had a bathroom downstairs too. So, but yeah it was…it was quite a place.

**Nykolaiszyn** *As a child, you mentioned your mom bought you to her sorority meetings there. Did your family take you to eat there at all?*

**Stanley** We didn’t eat out much. You know, back in the day, folks just didn’t eat out a lot. They ate at home a lot. I mean you would have people over to your house and eat or you would go to somebody’s house or your grandma’s or aunt’s or somebody. I do remember eating there maybe once or twice as a child growing up but it was a *real* special occasion to get to go to the Glass House and have dinner or lunch, you know, in the Broiler Room.

Now people would eat on the cafeteria line. People mostly ate over on the cafeteria line on that side, that were travelers. They just wanted to get some food in their kids and them and off they go. That was more of a hamburger, hot dogs, French fries, salads, Jell-O pudding, that kind of stuff, drinks, that sort of thing.

The Broiler Room had…you could get fried shrimp, you could get fried chicken, you’d have steak, you know, roast beef, those kinds of things. Lots of…lots of different things like that. The desserts I always thought were fantastic. When I worked in the Broiler Room, I loved to work the desserts because, you know, what kid doesn’t like sweets? (Laughter) You could lick your fingers as you were cutting pies and stuff.

**Nykolaiszyn** *When you were in high school did you have any events…*

**Stanley** Oh, yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *…at the Glass House?*

**Stanley** We always had the junior/senior banquet and prom—well the prom wasn’t there but the junior/senior banquet was always at the Glass House. It would be on the side where the cafeteria was so that you could…so that they could set up all those tables and have a large venue there. Set up tables and chairs and we would have our banquet there and have a nice meal that was, you know, plated and brought to you. Then we’d have…what else? We had other things too… What did we…? Sometimes if somebody was getting married or someone was having a baby, there’d be a shower in one of the banquet rooms. In fact, our wedding reception was out there. There were, yeah, there were several events out there.

I remember—my dad flew airplanes and they would have fly-ins because the airport was right next to the Glass House. People would land there and they would have fly-ins. They would all come and have breakfast and they would have some kind of a, you know, sit down breakfast for the guys that would, you know, fly in. So they had those kinds of events also. I’m sure there were other events that I didn’t know about, but those are ones that come to mind.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So you’re graduating from high school and eventually you start working at the Glass House?*

**Stanley** I started working right after my sophomore year.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, so how did you learn about a job opening at the Glass House?*

**Stanley** My mother and Annabell were best friends. (Laughter) Everybody who wanted to do something different from year to year, when you were in high school you would just know, you know. Kids would talk, I mean kids talk about everything. You know, “I worked at the Glass House last summer and they’re going to start taking applications here pretty soon.” So you’d rush out there and get your application and fill it out and take it back and wait for an interview or wait for a phone call. It was quite…quite an honor to get to work out there. I know a lot of kids worked at the grocery stores, the filling stations, you know. They’d work at cafes here in town, work at the movie theatre you know, different things like that. But getting a job at the Glass House always seemed to be, or any way in my estimation, always seemed to be quite the thing.

I got to start there before I was sixteen, actually. Like I said, Mother and Annabell were best friends, so I got to start a little early. I worked on the cafeteria line to begin with, probably the first summer…the whole summer there. But Annabell was one of these kind of bosses that if she needed you somewhere else, she had no qualms whatsoever about, “Come here. Let’s go over here, you’re going to do this,” or whatever. So I really worked all over the place. I worked with Warren [Fetter] down in the bakery some. I worked in the snack bar, I mean it’s not the snack bar, excuse me. I worked over in the gift shop, I worked in the Broiler Room, on the line, in the kitchen, I served parties you know, all kinds of things like that.

I don’t remember what that event was. It was the year I had graduated from high school or was graduating. It might have been my senior year, I even danced in a go-go cage. (Laughs) I don’t remember what it was for. It was probably for like a Chamber of Commerce thing or something, I don’t remember. Then I was, as a sophomore, I was the entertainment for the junior/senior banquet. I did the hula on a table, of all things. I had been to Hawaii when I was a young kid. My grandmother and step-granddad lived there so I spent a summer there and learned to do the hula. So I remember when I came back my mother had me doing the hula all over Vinita. I did hula for PTAs and Sunday school classes and sorority meetings and ultimately for the junior, (I was a sophomore), but for the junior/senior banquet. So it was quite interesting.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Describe the uniforms for me.*

**Stanley** Oh my god. The uniforms, if I had to wear one of those today, it would probably kill me because it was like being wrapped up in saran wrap. They were a yellow dress that buttoned all the way down. They were polyester fabric and they had puffy sleeves with a band around them and they were buttoned all the way to your neck. Then there were two buttons on either side of your shoulders and there was a white…I don’t know what it is, not really a vest but something that came down to the waist. Then you had a white cotton apron and then they had this square in the back that you would fold and put a…make a…I don’t remember what the little thing was that you put over it, but some kind of…you might have just made a knot in it, but it fanned out and that was the little thing that you wore on your head. Bobby pinned that to your head. Then we all had to wear white shoes and stockings.

The uniforms were—because it was air conditioned, it wasn’t so horrible, but if I had to wear that today, oh! Anyway, it was quite an ordeal. But I remember thinking that it was fantastic uniform, ‘Oh my gosh! I got to wear a uniform.’ And we would get two uniforms at the beginning, you know, when you started working there. You would get two full uniforms with your headpiece and your vest and your white apron and your dress. So you had one that wore and one clean for the next day and so you always, you know, you were rotating those. We would almost always bring two aprons to work with us because you never knew when you were going to spill something on you and you’d have to change that apron. If you got chocolate pudding on it, you had…Annabell would throw a fit if you didn’t change it so, yeah we always had two aprons.

The pieces, the vest and the apron and the thing that you wore in your hair, had to be starched and ironed because they were 100% cotton so it wasn’t anything—I mean you’d be standing there…I mean because I went to work at six o’clock in the morning and at 5:30 I might be standing there ironing my apron trying to get it ready so that I’d be ready to go to work. And that was in the day that we didn’t have pantyhose so we wore a girdle or a garter and hose and you always had to have an extra stocking or two with you because if you ran a stocking, you had to change. So it was a little bit…a little bit different. And I don’t remember what the guys wore because most of the men worked in the background and downstairs. They weren’t out on, you know, display like the girls were when we were in the cafeteria. There were a couple of guys that worked on the cafeteria line with us, but most of them worked, you know, either in maintenance or in the bakery or somewhere, or cooking or washing dishes. Then of course the guys who worked at the gas stations.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Do you remember what you were making?*

**Stanley** Ninety cents an hour and tips.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And on an average day, your tips would run…?*

**Stanley** I might make…well it would depend on where you were working. But if you were in the Broiler Room, you might make, you know, fifteen dollars a day. Ten or fifteen bucks a day especially if you got, you know, you got a big table or two, you know, of people. That would be really fantastic. I remember I made enough tips my last year that I worked there that I bought my antique china cabinet that I have now and it was $500.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Stanley** I had saved all my tips for a year to buy that china cabinet and it’s in my dining room right now with my china in it. So I bought that right before I got—I knew, you know, my husband and I had been dating since we were juniors, since he was a junior and I was a sophomore in high school and so we were, you know, high school sweethearts. So we knew were going to be getting married and so I started saving money and saving for things like my china cabinet because you know, I always wanted that china cabinet and it was an antique. I had seen it in my aunt’s antique store and I always wanted it. It’s a curved glass piece, really wide, and it’s got three big curved glasses on it. So yeah, those tips are what bought me that china cabinet.

So yeah, our tips were very important to us. Back in those days, you really didn’t have to report anything like that, you know. You got your pay, you got your check every two weeks and then whatever your tips were, you know, those were yours. You didn’t have to share with anybody. You didn’t have to turn them in, maybe you were supposed to but we were never told that we had to turn them in or anything, so you know whatever we got, we got.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well how did you learn to do the various jobs? How was the training?*

**Stanley** Annabell trained everybody. If she didn’t train you, Warren did. Most everybody started out in the cafeteria line because that was basically the easiest. When you would start at the cafeteria line, there was the flat-top grill and then you had the French fryer and on the other side of that, were the refrigerators and a door going into the back and on the other side was where the drinks were. So you would just go down the line and you would be taught by one of them how to cook the pancakes, how to cook the hamburgers, you know, how long to cook the French fries, and those sorts of things and what times you were supposed to start doing certain types of things, when you were supposed to quit. They gave us a general idea of the traveling public: what times people would start wanting hamburgers versus pancakes. So we would always, you know, kind of adjust to that.

I can always remember working on the line and somebody would be in the back, maybe on a smoke break or something, and they would yell, “Bus!” Everybody would just go crazy and you’d start just cooking up stuff and dishing up things because if a bus came in that had, you know, fifty people on it, you know, you were just slammed. Of course nothing was in to-go containers. You didn’t have to wash the dishes but you had to bus all the tables. If you had a bus boy, fine, but if you didn’t, you had to bus the tables and get everything back over to the kitchen so it could be washed and brought back across again for the line. So we were trained. We usually got about two days of training.

I was thinking about this this morning before I came. I thought, you know, I can remember everybody that worked on the line with me the first summer. None of us were over sixteen. Now how many people do you know of that would turn a business over to a bunch of sixteen-year-olds to operate? (Laughs) All of the experienced waitresses and people, older people, worked over in the Broiler Room. But *we* worked on the line and that was the hard work. I mean standing on your feet as a waitress was hard work, don’t get me wrong, but you know, to stand there flipping burgers, flipping pancakes, doing this and that, and making sure everything was full, you know. Making sure you had clean dishes and silverware, and cups and glasses and things, coffee was made, you know, all that. It was not easy. It wasn’t easy, but it was, you know, interesting to say the least. Taught me a lot about people.

I learned more about people than I did about anything, the traveling public. I always told, when I was teaching business especially, I would tell my kids, “If you can satisfy the traveling public, you can satisfy anyone.” Because, you know, you’re stuck in a car, you’ve got your kids, the dog, Grandma, you’re sitting in this car, you’re going cross country. I can remember traveling with my kids. It wasn’t easy and then to stop at a place, in a restaurant or whatever and get everybody fed when you’ve got a bawling kid and somebody else is starving to death and two boys that want to fight or whatever up and down the hall. So it was interesting.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Tell me about your experience working in the Broiler Room.*

**Stanley** In the Broiler Room? Okay. Well I finally got to graduate to the Broiler Room the summer before my senior year. I worked on the line two years and then I went over there and got to work in the Broiler Room and became a waitress. There was a lady over there that I sort of followed around because she seemed to be the one that knew how to get things done and she was really, um…she was a go-getter and she knew how to talk to people. I thought being able to talk to people would really make a difference and she was a good waitress. She was always Johnny-on-the-spot with the coffee pot, you know. She didn’t take any guff off of people. Her name was Betty Moon. I don’t know how old Betty was, she might have been in her 30s, 40s…I don’t know. Of course I was 17 and thought she was ancient. (Laughs)

I followed her around and began to learn how to work a station. And you know, until you’ve ever been a waitress, and you don’t really pay attention, you don’t realize it or I wouldn’t have, that certain waitresses have certain stations. There are always certain stations that are going to be your better stations than others because of their location. So if you’ve got a station that had some window tables, then you usually made a little more money. People liked to sit over there and they would linger and drink their coffee, and have a piece of pie and what-not.

Learning how to write things down on your pad and get it back to the kitchen and how to not forget something. That was always the hardest thing you know, especially at the beginning, was trying to remember how to, you know…you do your drinks, then you come back with a salad, and the meal, and the bread, and the butter, and then the dessert, and the tickets, and oh you know, remembering all that. Who had what, you know, especially when the place is full, trying to remember all that, even though you have it written down. Most of the time you start with one person on a certain spot on the table and you work your way around and that’s the way you deliver your food. Then you can do that. But if you for some reason messed up, you could be in a royal mess or get the wrong food to the wrong people, or maybe something wasn’t done correctly back in the kitchen. The waitress is always the one who catches it from the customer, so that’s kind of something that you kind of really had to work at.

Annabell was really good to train us as waitresses, though. She made sure that we knew how to set a table, we knew how to put the food down and how to take it up, how to walk around with a coffee pot. Even if it wasn’t your station, if you saw someone’s coffee empty, you poured coffee no matter what—if it was your station or not—to try to make the customers as comfortable as possible and get them their food as quickly and as hot as possible without making anybody, you know, sit and wait for food or what-not.

So yeah, a waitress is more than just taking an order and putting food on the table. You’ve got to talk to your customers, especially if you want to be good at what you do. You have to learn how to talk to the people. You know people will ask you lots of things about the area like, “Do you see any Indians around here?” You know things like that. Back then, you know, people would ask those kind of questions. Or you know, “Where are all the cowboys,” and “What do they do?” They’d ask you about things like the Grand Lake, you know, because we are so close to the lake. They’d ask us about that. Route 66 wasn’t as big of a deal back then as it is now, so we didn’t get a whole lot of questions about that. Mostly about the Indians from people who were travelling through, you’d get questions like that. But there again, being a waitress is…there’s more to it than just taking an order and putting food on the table.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well what type woman was Annabell Southern?*

**Stanley** Annabell? She was a spit-fire. She was about four-foot nine, or ten maybe. She was a demanding boss, but not in a way that you were fearful of her or worried for your job or anything like that. When she told you to do something, she expected you to do it and do it the way she wanted it done, and everybody did it. I mean I don’t know of anybody that ever really bucked Annabell about things because she knew the business so well.

Her mentor was Mrs. Kellow. Kellow was the one that came here—I never did know the woman’s first name, we just always called her Kellow. She came here when the Glass House opened and she hired Annabell to be the manager. Annabell was working for Public Service at the time and she was a, I don’t know what they call them. She would go around and demonstrate stoves and things like that, and cook you know, and do all that sort of thing. She was quite the accomplished cook. So she was always interesting as far as when you would have a banquet or something like that, you know, she’d always try some new things and different ways of serving things. But when she was training you, she expected you to stand there and listen to everything she said and retain it. And if you had any kind of a problem or if you had any kind of an issue with a customer or another employee, you had no qualms about going to Annabell about it, because she was there to listen to you and take your concerns to heart.

Outside the Glass House, she was a fun person, a very fun person. Between she and my mother and my grandmother, they taught me to cook almost anything in the world and not be afraid of cooking it. I can remember going to places with Annabell and Mother. (Laughs) And we would be in a restaurant eating pie and coffee or something and she [Annabell] would pick up a coffee pot and just walk around the room with it and start filling cups. (Laughter) “You need some coffee?” and she would pour your coffee for you. She was quite a character.

She was very well-known around this area. She was an interesting person, had lots of background having been in a lot of different places, having lived in a lot of different places. She was fun to travel with. Whenever I was grown and married and had kids, I was in the sorority that Mother and Annabell belonged to. I went with Annabell and her sister, Catherine, and her two nieces and another friend from Elk City [Oklahoma]. We went to Hawaii for two weeks. She was fun to travel with. Your feet hit the floor every morning. You were off and going and doing things. Looking and seeing, you know, interesting…learning about interesting people and interesting things. You went all day long and when it was time to go to bed, you were in bed because you knew your feet were going to hit the floor at daylight the next morning. So she was a hard traveler and a hard worker.

She was not afraid to do anything that she asked you to do. She would do anything that she asked you to do. She was very fair. She was a very fair woman. I never had any problems with her. Of course, like I said, I had known her all my life so it was like working for my parents, almost. But I always knew if I screwed up at work, she’d be the first one to call my mother and tell her, so I never did. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well that’s what I was going to ask.*

**Stanley** No, never. I never bucked her with anything. You know if she said to do it, I did it because I knew she had a reason for doing what she did. Now some people will tell you to do things and you’ll go, “Wonder why they want that,” but Annabell would always tell you why you were doing something the way you were doing it. She was really good to give you lots of information. Like I said, she’d tell you and she’d expect you to retain that. I know the first couple of banquets that I worked in the ballrooms, she would tell us what she wanted us to do. You had a certain job to do and you were expected to go do it. That was it.

I did banquets, I did prep work in the kitchen. I played the piano for a lot of different banquets that were there. For like cocktail hour, you know, I’d play the piano, play some music for them. Or if we had somebody that was going to come and sing or something, she’d always tell me I needed to play this because they were going to sing. Then I’d work the room, set the tables, do the serving. I mean we all did that so it wasn’t anything just me in particular. We all did those kinds of things.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Do you recall any notable folks passing through?*

**Stanley** Uh, Colonel Sanders. One time. I remember seeing him coming through. We would be told that there were people coming or going. “Oh you just missed so-and-so,” you know, because you weren’t there or if you were working on the other end, you might not see them. We had…we played host to governors and you know, people in politics and that sort of things. If they had meetings, they would be at the Glass House mostly because that was one of the locations where it was kind of a centrally located place where everybody could come. People would fly in. You know, we’d see people fly in but we wouldn’t be able to get to the airport to see them because we were working. We’d just be looking out the windows and watching. Yeah, we had notable people but the only one I really remember was Colonel Sanders. He had the white suit and the white beard and mustache and white hair.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Did he order the fried chicken?*

**Stanley** I don’t remember. (Laughter). I’ve thought that several times. I thought, “What do I remember that he ordered?” I don’t remember what he ordered and he wasn’t at my station so I don’t know. I think actually I was across the hall on the cafeteria line at that time. We just got to go peek around the corner and watch him.

**Nykolaiszyn** *When you would take a break, what would you do?*

**Stanley** Well when we had our breaks, which were not too often. you know you’d get a couple of breaks during the day and then your lunch. We would go in the back, when I was on the line, we’d go in the back and you’d go get a coke or whatever and sit down back there and rest. If you needed to change your apron or whatever, go fix your makeup or your hair or something, off to the bathroom you’d go. Of course we didn’t have cell phones or anything like that so we’d sit and talk to each other. We’d visit with each other and we all smoked. Back in the day, you know, everybody was smokers. So we’d sit back there and smoke.

We had one fella that worked on the line with us who was quite the practical joker. I can remember one particular—I don’t remember what the situation was—but one time he unscrewed the lids of the salt and pepper shakers. [He] just barely put them on so when you tipped your salt shaker over, your food was just ruined with salt. I remember another time when I was actually on break, when all of the sudden I heard this horrible crash, *bing, bang, boom*, or whatever. One of the other girls had taken a tray of dishes across the hall to the kitchen for dishwashing and opened the door, went in, and slipped on some water and (claps hands) just fell down. Dishes just went everywhere, all over. So there went our break. (Laughs) We had to go clean the mess up. But you know, those kind of things happen.

We’d just hang out in the back and joke and laugh. Sometimes we’d go down to the gift shop or I might go downstairs into the bakery and watch—especially if we were getting ready for a wedding. Warren would be decorating a cake, and I’d go down and watch him decorate cakes sometimes. I enjoyed that. I would down and see what was going on. Then Annabell would be in her office doing whatever Annabell did, which was run the place. It was fun to kind of watch. You know I worked pretty much all over that place so I knew what it took to run the whole thing. I mean a lot of people just went in, worked their shift, and left. They didn’t really have any idea about what was going on behind the scenes. I got to work in a lot of the different…I got to work everywhere except the snack bar, because I never worked that late at night. Yeah, I saw the whole thing from beginning to finish.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Did you have any interactions with the Conoco guys?*

**Stanley** Oh yeah, we knew them all. The boys that worked in the filling stations down there were kids that went to school with us. The Conoco guy, the guy that ran the stations, was a fellow here in town and his sons worked there. We knew them. Like I said the boys that worked in the filling station part, they were kids that went to school with us so we knew them. We’d always visit with them on the way in or out because we’d have to cross, you know cross over the driveways to get to our cars.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Any workers come to mind that you remember fondly?*

**Stanley** Warren, of course. Warren Fetter. He was Annabell’s right hand man. She depended on him a lot, to do a lot of things. He was very good at doing what…he knew her inside and out so he knew exactly what was going on. The kids that I worked with over on the line, Sheila Rohmiller, Sally Pope, Pam [Pitcher], Gene Kidd, you know those were people that we all worked together. We were quite the team over there. Then over in the Broiler Room, Vera—Williams now is her name—and Betty Moon, two of the waitresses. Well actually Vera was, she was waitress but she the hostess also. Then Mrs. Reed was a hostess there too.

Then back in the kitchen…oh what is her name? I cannot remember her name. Little short black woman, I don’t remember what her name is right now but she was a character too. Then Big John. John Oglesby. He took care of all the dishes. He was the dish man. You know if you had anything that you were afraid of, you’d go get John because he was a big guy. (Laughs) A big Osage Indian, he wasn’t afraid of anything. So yeah, we had a lot of people that we all knew each other. You know, this is a small town and almost everybody that worked there was from Vinita or the surrounding area.

**Nykolaiszyn** *How many summers did you work there?*

**Stanley** Sixty-five, ’66, ’67 worked there in the summers. Then when I graduated I worked there on weekends when I would come home from school. I also worked parties and banquets. A lot of us would stay on for…we wouldn’t work at the Glass House during our weekends or stuff while we were in high school but if they had special things, they might call us in to work a party or something. We did those. So I worked there for three summers and then the weekends and holidays and things that first year after I got out of high school.

**Nykolaiszyn** *What’s the last time you’ve been back?*

**Stanley** Well, right before it closed we went out there. Then of course when it was McDonald’s we were out there several times. Then, oh shoot, we went out there and had lunch a month or so ago, I guess. We went to get a Subway [sandwich].

**Nykolaiszyn** *After the remodel?*

**Stanley** After the remodel. It’s kind of heartbreaking to see what all they’ve done to it. I mean, I know everything now is big, open-concept and that’s the popular thing, but it just kind of looks like a big old’ warehouse now, unfortunately. [I’ve] got a lot of fond memories of it though.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, married and have kids?*

**Stanley** Yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Grandkids?*

**Stanley** Married my high school sweetheart, we had two daughters. One of them is married and divorced and the other is married, has been married for a long time. She has eight children. I have four grown grandkids, two that are grown and married now. All the kids that have come—when my grandkids come we always go to the Glass House to eat a hamburger or something like that and tell them stories, you know, “Back when Grandma worked there.” Stephanie, my daughter that’s the mother of all these kids, she actually worked there when McDonald’s opened. When they changed it and it became a McDonald’s she was one of the first employees there, so she worked there too for, I don’t know, maybe a summer or something like that. Yeah, we always take the kids back to the Glass House so the kids can see what it was. Of course, it’s nothing like it used to be.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well you’re a lifelong Vinita resident. How has Vinita changed through the years?*

**Stanley** Wow. A lot and not at all. It’s really hard to say. Downtown has really gone to sleep and is in a long, long sleep I think. I’m hoping that at some point in time some of the businesses will come back. We’ve had several that have opened and closed and opened and closed. It’s just not the way it used to be. The way we shop now is so different than the way we shopped in the ’30s, ’40s, ’50s, ’60s. It’s hard to see that a lot of that might come back, might not. So we’ve had a lot of change there and a lot of things have moved out on the edges of town. People are more apt to get in their cars and drive to Joplin or Tulsa to shop because there’s more variety.

It kind of makes me sad that people will go out of town and buy things like cars and things like that when we have perfectly good car dealers here. They think they’re going to get a better deal and they’re really not. If you…you know, the way I look at it is if I need my car worked on, and I bought a car out of town, I have to go out of town to have it fixed. If I buy a car here in town, I can just call one of the guys and say “Hey, come and fix my car or come get my car,” whatever—or tires or, you know, things like that. Those kinds of things have changed.

We still are a pretty close knit community when it comes to things like civic groups. They’re still important to the community. The churches all, obviously, are very important to our community. My husband and I and another couple were the founders of Peaceful Animal Adoption Shelter, which is a new animal shelter here. Which, you know, years ago people would never have thought of an animal shelter but we do have that now. You know people are, for the most part, are into helping animals as well as humans.

Homes in Vinita have remained about the same. Of course, you know there’s always going to be new homes built but as far as people living in single-family homes, that’s still pretty much that way. Now we, my husband and I, do have some apartments and some townhomes that we have some people living in, obviously. But for the most part most people live in single-family structures. They work here. We don’t have a huge industrial park but we do have a few businesses here. A lot of people will work in, you know, other towns nearby and drive to work and back which I wouldn’t want to do, but I did it for a while because I taught in Ketchum but that’s fifteen miles. It’s not like I’m going to drive to Tulsa every day to go to work or somewhere like that. But yeah…so that kind of thing has changed.

The face of the business world has changed in Vinita. The school districts, the school system, it seems to me that we haven’t really grown. There were ninety-seven kids in my graduating class and there were probably ninety graduating kids in the graduating class last year. So as far as the size of the district has gone, we probably haven’t changed a lot which kind of gives you an idea about the size of the community. We’re still right around 6,000 [people]. A lot of people live out in the country, you know, rather than living in town. They wanted a few acres out so they could have a horse or a couple of cows or something. So a lot of people live outside of town. But you know, for the most part, we’ve got everybody living in Vinita. We still are a farming and ranching community. That’s, you know, mainly what we have.

We do have the Home of Hope which is a facility for developmentally challenged adults. So there are a lot of—I wouldn’t say a lot—several homes around town that have been modified for those residents and they live in there, in those homes, with their caregivers. So we have quite a few of those. Back in the day, we had Eastern State Hospital, which was called you know, “Vinita, you must live in the nut house.” That was always a joke. That closed, as far as the mental health facility, and reopened as a minimum security prison. A lot of people work out there. So we have a lot of employees from that. I don’t really know how many inmates there are but it is minimum security so they come and go, you know. They’re not here for very long periods of time. So that’s another large employer that we have.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Lots of changes through the years.*

**Stanley** Lots of changes. Lots of changes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well as we start to wind down, what’s one thing you want to make sure you definitely tell us about your memories of working at the Glass House?*

**Stanley** The fact that people, no matter what station of life they’re in, they all are pretty much the same. I don’t care if you’re a senator or if you’re a dishwasher. When you come into a restaurant and you sit down, you expect the same things. You expect to be treated with respect, your service to be prompt and pleasant, and the food to be good. That’s something that I remember that was instilled in me from Annabell. Be nice to your customers. Be good to them. They’ve been working hard, traveling. Your truckers come in you know. They’re driving that big old truck and they’re hot or cold you know. They’re tired and want a cup of coffee or whatever. Be nice to them.

Always be nice to people. You might be having a hard day. Maybe, you know, somebody cussed you out or maybe you feel like you were about two inches tall, but you’ve got to learn how to blow that off and move on to the next customer that comes in. And I think just learning how to be a good person is one of the things that really sticks in my about what I learned from working there.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Toni, I think that’s a great place to end. Thank you so much.*

**Stanley** I think it is too. Thank you. I appreciate it.

**Nykolaiszyn** *We appreciate you sharing your memories of the Glass House with us.*

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*